Overview

We are a group of thirteen to fourteen year-old students from Raffles Institution, Singapore. Singapore is unique as we are able to integrate the different racial groups in Singapore together effectively. Because of recent racial conflicts and dissent among different racial groups in the world, we would like to share the how and why of Singapore’s achievements in racial harmony with the rest of the world. This is in order to promote peace by racial harmony in parts of the world that are facing problems trying to help people of different racial groups live together harmoniously.

Our aim: To promote racial harmony and help to integrate people of different racial groups around the world.

Our plan: We will go around Singapore, gathering information from the people and organizations that have been set up by the Singapore goverment to promote and maintain racial harmony in Singapore.

To begin: You can go to the section entitled “The Story” and the subtopic entitled “The Singapore Story” to find out more about Singapore’s success and some case studies around the world. You can also go to “Survey Analysis” under the “Analysis” section to learn more about Singaporeans’ responses to racial harmony in Singapore. Alternatively, you can go to the “Interview Analysis” section under the “Analysis” section to find out what government officials think about racial harmony.

If you would like to find out more about us, go to the “About Us” section to learn more.

We hope that you will be able to learn more about racial harmony after visiting our website. Thank you! ☺

The Problem

Firstly, what is racial harmony? Well, generally, racial harmony refers to a group of people of different races or nationalities working, playing and living together harmoniously and in peace without serious conflicts. Generally, racial harmony means people of a certain race or nationality treat people from different races of nationalities the same way that they would treat people of the same race as themselves.

However, racial harmony has been a perpetual problem in many parts of the world throughout history and even today. Millions of people have been massacred just because they were of a certain race, for example, the Jews that were slaughtered during the Holocaust. Even till today, people are rioting because of racism against their race or nationality.

Why does Singapore need racial harmony? First of all, Singapore has four main races, Chinese, Indian, Malay and Eurasian. Thus, it is critical that these different racial groups can live together in harmony as Singapore is a small country; we do not have natural resources such as oil or coal, Singapore has to buy its water from neighboring countries such as Malaysia, the sand that is used for construction work in Singapore is imported from Indonesia and other countries. Thus, the biggest asset of Singapore would be its manpower. This is why it is so important for Singapore to have racial harmony, because with racial harmony, Singapore is able to function as a whole nation and progress effectively so that we do not fall behind. With racial harmony, the government does not have to deal with racial conflict or other racial issues; our government will then be able to focus more on other things that help to improve Singapore economically or socially. This is why Singapore, although being such a small country, is able to grow and sustain itself effectively.

Thus, the real world problem that my group is trying to solve would be the racial conflict and racism that exists in some parts of the world. We will attempt to solve these problems by trying to test if Singapore’s methods in helping to maintain racial harmony in Singapore have been effective and if they can be implemented in other countries to solve racial conflicts and disharmony.

Process

So, how did we go around collecting our data and information? There were three sections to our collection of data and information. The first section would be a literature review on the various initiatives started by the government to promote and conserve racial harmony in Singapore. The second section would be the analysis of the completed surveys given to the Singaporeans and foreigners. Finally, the last section would be the interviews conducted with several government officials in charge of organizations that have been set-up to conserve and promote racial harmony in Singapore.

Litertature review: What our group did was to firstly, do some research on the various government initiatives done by the Singapore government to help different racial groups integrate, such as the HDB housing quota, or the education system in Singapore. We compiled the data that we had gathered and wrote the main points down in order for us to reference to the data more easily. With this data, we started writing our report on the government initiatives which can be seen in the next section of our website.

Surveys: We made a survey form which had a few questions that we thought may be helpful in helping us understand the extent of racial harmony in Singapore. But before releasing the survey to the general public, we gave out a few pilot surveys to find out the weaknesses in our survey and the areas in which we could improve on in our survey. When we went around Chinatown and Little India, we gave out a few survey forms to some tourists to find out their views on the racial harmony in Singapore. (To Be continued after survey analysis)

Interviews: Our teacher-mentor, Mrs Cheryl Yap, had some contacts in Onepeople.sg, we managed to contact the programm manager and arranged with him to interview his boss, Mr Ramesh Ganeson. As we had already planned a few interview questions beforehand, the interview went smoothly and we managed to take both a video and audio recording of the interview. After the interview with Mr Ramesh, we reviewed the video recording and managed to get both a direct transcript and an analysed transcript of the inteview which we then posted on our website. (To be continued after interview with the Inter-Religious Council)

History

History, Racial Riots Maria Hertogh

Maria Bertha Hertogh was born on the 24th of March, 1937, and was the focus of the racial riots in Singapore in December 1950. Her mother, Adeline Hertogh gave Maria to a family friend, Aminah bte Mohammad, on the 15th of November 1942 as her father was a prisoner of war and her mother could not cope with the stress of raising another child. Aminah and Maria then moved to Jakarta, then Bandung and finally went to Terengganu, Malaysia. Maria then grew up in Aminah’s hometown where she studied at Chukai Malay Girls’ School and became a Muslim.

When Maria’s parents had been united after the war, they began searching for Maria. Maria’s parents lodged a request with Dutch officials to locate their daughter. One of the Dutch officials spotted Maria at a school competition and alerted the authorities. Aminah was requested to bring Maria to Singapore to discuss the issue of Maria’s custody with the Dutch Consul – General who was in Singapore. A custody battle then ensued over Maria in Court.

Custody of Maria was initially given to Aminah. Within four days of the ruling, on 1st of August 1950, Maria was married off to Mansoor Adabi, a 22-year-old teacher at a Government School. Maria’s mother, Adeline then appealed to the court for custody over Maria and raised the issue of Maria’s marriage as Maria was only thirteen at the time. On the 2nd of December 1950, custody of Maria was given to Adeline Hertogh who brought her to Amsterdam, Netherlands.

A few days after custody of Maria was given to Adeline, Aminah appealed for the custody of Maria again. However, the court threw out the appeal within five minutes of the hearing. The riots were sparked off over the custodial ruling as the Muslims in Singapore felt that the colonial legal system was biased against Muslims. In total, 18 people were killed after the riots ended on the 13th of December.

References:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Hertogh_riots>

<http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_508_2004-12-23.html>

<http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_83_2005-02-02.html>

History

1964 Race Riots in Singapore

When Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaysia, many among the small Malay minority expected that they would also benefit from the special rights for Malays enshrined in the 1957 Federation of Malaya Constitution. There was deep resentment when it became apparent that this was never part of the agreement for merger and would never be agreed upon by any government of Singapore.  
  
**19 July 1964** : More than 1,000 Malay non-political leaders from 101 organisations met Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore and Encik Othman Wok, the Minister for Social Affairs to clarify the issue of the special rights for Malays.  
  
At the meeting, Mr Lee promised that while every effort would be made by the government to train Malays for top positions in competition with non-Malays, the government would neither allow a quota system for jobs nor special licences and land reservations for Malays. He reiterated that all Singaporean citizens had equal rights, regardless of race.  
  
Meanwhile, the Straits Times of 21 July 1964 reported that more than 25,000 Muslims in Singapore would participate in a giant rally at the Padang on the following day to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. Celebrations would also be held in Kuala Lumpur and in towns throughout Malaysia.  
  
**20 July 1964** : In response to Mr Lee, the 23-man Singapore UMNO Action Committee, a political organisation which claimed to speak for all Singapore Malays, called on him to use his time in curbing the secret society menace instead of splitting the Malay community. The Action Committee was headed by UMNO State leader, Senator Ahmad Haji Taff who claimed that the meeting was an insult to the Malays. He defended his Action Committee against accusations of communalism by the Premier, by counter-charging that Mr Lee himself was trying to break the harmony and good relations between Malays and Chinese. He emphasised, "Our campaign has been directed solely at Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his Government for not implementing the special rights clause in the Constitution - not campaign against the Chinese."  
  
On the **21st of July, 1964**, around 25,000 Malays gathered at the Pandang, Singapore to celebrate the Muslim prophet Muhammad’s birthday. After Prophet Muhammad’s speech, the procession went on to Geylang. Along the way, a policeman asked a dispersed group to re-join the main procession. Instead of obeying the orders, the group attacked the policeman. This incident led to a race riot after a group of Malays attacked ethnic Chinese-Malay passer-by and spectators. In the first day of rioting, four people were killed and 178 people were injured. The government arrested about 3,000 people.

**2 September 1964** : Racial tensions exploded once again when a Malay trishaw rider was stabbed to death at night. Rioting erupted again and continued for another five days with 12 people killed, 109 injured and over 1,200 people arrested for rioting and curfew-breaking. The curfew was lifted on 11 September when the situation returned to normal.

There have been many reasons cited for the riots; the Malaysia Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak blamed ethnic Indonesian and Communist provocateurs. Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and several observers blamed the riots on the ultra-nationalist faction in United Malays National Organization (UMNO). The riots occurred when the People’s Action Party (PAP) based in Singapore and the UMNO relations were severely strained as the PAP challenged the UMNO during the 1964 Malaysia federal election. This led to racial tensions between the Malays and the Chinese.

Racial harmony day is now celebrated in Singapore on the 21st of July every year to commemorate the 1964 race riots, and to remind Singaporeans the importance of racial harmony.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_race_riots_in_Singapore>

<http://infopedia.nl.sg/articles/SIP_45_2005-01-06.html>

History-Analysis

As you can see from the above cases, racial harmony is volatile and can be easily disrupted by small triggers such as the Maria Hertogh case where the ruling of a court sparked off racial conflict. Even though it takes a huge government effort to help build up racial harmony, such as implementing changes in the education system to help stabilise racial harmony and the Ethinic Integration Policy, which will be explained in greater detail further on, racial harmony can still be disrupted as it is not given that racial harmony will always be stable.

Thus, we should not take racial harmony for granted and should treasure it. Especially in the Singapore context, where all the races are represented quite equally; as there are four main different races being crammed into a small island that is Singapore, there is bound to be contact between the different racial groups. All of these show that racial harmony should be respected and treasured by Singaporeans.

Also, if there is constant racial conflict between the four main racial groups, Singapore’s government would have to spend a lot of its manpower to prevent racial conflict, Singapore would then be unable to progress and develop effectively to the metropolis that it is today.

The Story – Government Initiatives

So, let us examine Singapore, what has been done to make us so unique that allows people of different races to live together without conflict? One of these things would be the government initiatives that have been implemented to help Singapore stay united as a nation without running into racial conflicts. There are several areas in which the government has initiated in order to help maintain racial harmony in Singapore. These areas are as follows, education, housing, religion, festivals, policies and GRCs. We will first be talking about education.

education-Government initiatives

Schools play an important role in ensuring that racial harmony. This is because they teach the children from a very young age about the importance of racial harmony. Thus, the children would be more tolerant and also understand the other races’ culture when they grow up. This helps to integrate and stabilize racial harmony in Singapore.

## Teaching racial harmony in subjects

One of the ways is to introduce the concept of racial harmony in school subjects such as Civics and Morals Education (CME). During CME lessons, pupils are able to interact with friends from other races, appreciate and understand other races’ practices, and most importantly, understand the importance of racial harmony. In addition, they would also learn core values such as care, respect and social bonding.

Social Studies are also another compulsory subject that introduces the concept of racial harmony. Through role plays and field trips to historic sites, the students are able to learn in a more engaging and interactive way. In social studies, the students would learn about the making of modern-day multi-racial Singapore. They would also learn about the challenges faced by a multi-racial society like Singapore, such as racial riots and terrorism, and how it threatens the racial harmony in Singapore.

After learning Social Studies, the student should be able to appreciate the cultural diversity in Singapore and show respect to every member of the society regardless of race, language and religion. Moreover, the student should also understand the importance of racial harmony and appreciate the need to work at maintaining peace and harmony in our society.

## Racial harmony day celebrations

Celebrating Racial Harmony Day is also another way how pupils can learn more about racial harmony. On that day, pupils are strongly encouraged to come to school in their own or even others’ traditional costume, be it the *sari*, *cheongsam* or the *baju kurung.* By doing so, the pupils would feel proud of their own culture. Moreover, the pupils would also understand the culture of the other races too.

The schools in Singapore would organize many different kinds of fun and exciting activities. There would be food fairs where pupils can taste the various kinds of traditional foods. Besides that, pupils can also watch traditional dances performed, or take part in traditional games such as *congkak*. The children would have a fun-filled day and would understand as well as appreciate the cultures of others.

## committee on strengthening racial harmony in schools

The Ministry of Education also has formed the Committee on Strengthening Racial Harmony in Schools in February 2002. The committee comprises of representatives from the Ministry of Education, schools, parent-support groups as well as the Community Development Councils.

Their aim is to foster racial and religious harmony among students. The committee achieves this aim by organizing lively and engaging games for the students at school-level. An example is the Racial Harmony Games Day which is held annually on Racial Harmony Day at a national level. This would encourage bonding and inter-racial mixing among students of different races. In addition, this would foster deeper inter-racial understanding and the students would learn to respect other races.

References: <http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/aesthetics-health-and-moral-education/files/civics-and-moral-education-primary-english-2007.pdf>

<http://www.ne.edu.sg/ne_messages.htm>

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2003/sp20030215.htm>

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2002/pr26042002.htm>

<http://www.google.com.sg/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=2&sqi=2&ved=0CCUQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pl.sg%2FShowBinary%2FBEA%2520Repository%2FDocs%2Fdoc_RH_Committee%2520on%2520Strengthening.doc&rct=j&q=schools%2C%20racial%20harmony&ei=oQ0YTYvLF4mIrAf3ys2KDA&usg=AFQjCNEyDK8ZUqLoX_9YGEuLrartwxA3yw&cad=rja>

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/press/2010/07/infosheet-racial-harmony-day.php>

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/2002/sp20072002a.htm>

[http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/humanities/files/social-studies-lower-secondary-normal-technical.pdf](http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/humanities/files/social-studies-lower-secondary-normal-technical.pdf%20(14)

Festivals-government initiatives

In Singapore, there are five main festivals celebrated by the religious groups in Singapore. The Indians celebrate Deepavali, the Malays celebrate Hari Raya Puasa, the Chinese celebrate Chinese New Year and the Eurasians celebrate Christmas. The existence of these festivals in Singapore shows the tolerance each race towards each other as they allow the different racial groups to celebrate their own culture and traditions.

## Deepavali

Deepavali is a five day festival celebrated by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs. Deepavali begins between September and October and ends between October and November. Deepavali is commonly known as the “Festival of Lights” as many lights and firecrackers are illuminated during this period. The two main reasons for the celebration of Deepavali were to welcome Rama, the seventh avatar of the Supreme God Vishnu, back home after 14 years of banishment. The other was to celebrate the slaying of the demon Naraksura. The celebration of Deepavali takes place over the course of 5 days, which are, *VasuBaras, NarakaChaturdashi, LakshimiPuja, Bali Pratipada* and *Bhaiduj.*

## Hari raya puasa

Hari Raya Puasa is a very important occasion that is celebrated by Muslims all over the world; Hari Raya marks the end of one month of fasting for the Muslims. The month in which Muslims fast before Hari Raya Puasa is called Ramandan. During their fasting, the Muslims do not eat or drink for twelve hours. Only the sick and the pregnant are excused from fasting. The purpose of fasting is to remind Muslims to exercise self control and submitting themselves to Allah, the Holy One. On the morning of Hari Raya, Muslims put on new clothes and go to a mosque to pray to offer their thanks to Allah and ask forgiveness from their elders.

## Chinese new year

Chinese New Year is a celebration to commemorate the new year of the Chinese calendar. The festival falls on a different date every year ranging from the 21st of January and the 20th of February and lasts for fifteen days. During this period, adults would give out red packets to children. These red packets usually contain money or chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil. Firecrackers are also set alight during this point of time to scare away the evil spirits as the explosions from the firecrackers are extremely loud.

## christmas

Christmas is a holiday generally observed on the 25th of December to commemorate the birth of Jesus, an important figure in Christianity. Christmas is nowadays celebrated by non-Christians around the world. Modern celebrations of Christmas consist of gift giving, exchanging of Christmas cards and the display of decorations such as Christmas trees, the hanging of mistletoe and holly. Many famous figures related to Christmas have also appeared such as Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas and Father Christmas.

## conclusions from festivals

The existence of festivals in Singapore from the different races shows that the Singaporean government is open to the different religious groups and the celebration of the festivals. They allow for multi-racial practices to happen and be organized. The organization of such festivals allows for other races to commemorate a certain festival which they do not normally celebrate. This can only happen without conflict if the society is harmonious racially.

Housing (EIP)-government initiatives

Eight out of ten Singaporeans live in Housing and Development Board (HDB) estates. In order to help the different racial groups living in HDB estates to integrate, the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP) was introduced in 1989. Under the Ethnic Integration Policy, the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians in Singapore each have a representative quota of homes for them in a HDB housing block or neighborhood. Once the quota has been reached, no further sale of the HDB flats to that ethnic group will be allowed. The current EIP limits for a HDB block are, 13% for Indian/Others, 25% for the Malays and 87% for the Chinese. Some Singaporeans felt that the EIP policy has become inconvenient and increasingly irrelevant. However, the National Development Minister Mr. Mah Bow Tan said that: “Racial harmony is not a given for Singapore. It's not a given for any multi-racial society … the EIP must remain. By maintaining a multi-racial environment in our housing estates, schools, shops and playgrounds, we maintain social stability, racial harmony and religious tolerance, and keep Singapore safe, secure and prosperous for all races*”*

## Analysis

What the EIP does is that it prevents the formation or racial enclaves by ensuring a balanced racial mix in public housing estates. As the HDB estate is a microcosm the Singaporean society, due to the fact that there is a racial mix, the youths that grow up in HDB estates will have a higher tolerance level for the different racial groups that exist in Singapore as they are already used to living with people of different races when they grew up.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism#Singapore>

<http://www.hdb.gov.sg/fi10/fi10322p.nsf/w/SellFlatEthnicIntegrationPolicy_EIP?OpenDocument>

Policies-government initiatives

The government has established many policies in order to improve racial integration and increase racial awareness. One of these policies implemented in recent times, in response to the increasing number of inter-marriages in Singapore, is the double-barrelled race policy. Through the double-barreled race policy, a new-born baby in Singapore, born into a family with parent of different races, may choose both of the parents’ races instead of the usual policy of adopting the race of the paternal side. This was done in order to increase open-mindedness between the different races, by opening up new possibilities for race, and to learn other races’ culture in cases where it would not be the case so.

Another government policy that has been highly successful is the establishment of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. This act, set up in 1990 and with recent updates, provides equality for the different religions and races in Singapore. An example of its accomplishments is the decision not to implement a state religion, because the doing so would decrease racial and religious flexibility. Another success of this act was the establishment of various religious organizations in Singapore, such as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore for Malays. These religious organizations assist to express the general feelings of the entire religion and race to the government, and to offer suggestions in the management of important issues relating to the community.

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act has also led to the establishment of other acts, designed to solve the concerns related to an entire race or religion in general. An example of such an act was the Muslim Law Act, established in 1968 in order to allow Muslims to practice their religion without fear of treading on the wrong side of the law. The Muslim Law Act includes allowing Muslims to practice polygamy, and created a shari’a court in Singapore to handle Muslim matters according to the laws of Islam.

Besides the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, there are other policies that the government has implemented in order to preserve racial and religious harmony. An example of this is the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, a council built to examine all pending bills on whether they cause discriminatory actions to minority races, religions, or communities. The members of this council are all important members in Singapore’s parliamentary of legislative system, such as the Prime Minister of Singapore and the Chief Justice of Singapore, in order to ensure wisdom in judgments towards the pending bills.

Islam in Singapore. (2011). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Singapore>

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*Maintenance of religious harmony act*. (1992, March 31). Retrieved from <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-167A>

Presidential council for minority rights. (2011).*Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Council_for_Minority_Right>

Case studies

## Britain

British Prime Minister David Cameron has said that multiculturalism has failed in Britain and his country is responsible for fostering Islam extremism. Cameron said “Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values.” Cameron continued “So, when a white person holds objectionable views, racist views for instance, we rightly condemn them. But when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who is not white, we have been too cautious, frankly -– frankly, even fearful –- to stand up to them….”  What this has done is that it has left Muslim youths in Britain feeling rootless and thus they turn to radical Islam. This “hands-off” approach has also led to racial enclaves in Britain where people of a certain racial group form an enclave in a part of Britain and live there. This shows the failure of Britain in its attempt to integrate its people.

<http://www.hudson-ny.org/1869/british-multiculturalism-failure>

## Germany

Germany has been suffering from a problem of multiculturalism resulting from a stream of Muslim immigrants moving and settling in Germany permanently. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has addressed her own party, the Christian Democratic Union, that Germany’s attempts to construct a peaceful and multicultural society had “utterly failed,” in her words. This is a result of the large population of Muslim immigrants that now compose the German population. The situation in Germany is one of such: the newly-immigrated Muslims are building their own society, rather than adopting the one Germany possessed; and therefore causing a lack of integration between the native Germans and the Muslims. As there is no limit for the number of Muslims entering the country, the Muslim society continues to grow at an almost unstoppable pace, resulting between tension between the Muslims and the rest of Germany.

Criticism of multiculturalism. (2011). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_multiculturalism>

Kern, S. (2011, February 10). *The failure of British multiculturalism*. Retrieved from <http://www.hudson-ny.org/1869/british-multiculturalism-failure>

## France Case Study

France is currently trying to create a middle ground between the religious Muslim laws, upheld by over six million Muslims in France, and the conventional laws upheld by ordinary French citizens. The Muslims have been complaining about the lack of Muslim awareness in French laws, especially after the new ruling in France which banned the use of face-covering veils that Muslims women find religiously upholding. However, the French, especially the government, insist that the Muslims should integrate into French culture and laws instead of trying to make new ones that suit themselves solely. The French president, Nicholas Sarkozy, has deemed multiculturalism a failure, and has mentioned clearly to the Muslim community in France that he did not want citizens of France who would not agree to “melt into a single community.” He has also denounced the Muslim habit of praying on the streets. There has also been a sharp increase in the number of Muslim riots in France; many Muslim districts have been cordoned off by the police as unsafe for citizens.

Multiculturalism. (2011). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 19, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism>

Kern, S. (2011, March 17). *Debate heats up over Muslims in France*. Retrieved from <http://www.hudson-ny.org/1969/muslims-in-france>

## Analysis

The three case studies mentioned above shows the failures of countries around the world who have tried to attain racial integration but have failed. Singapore has managed to effectively integrate its people as Singapore’s government has taken the initiative to help its people to integrate effectively such as the HDB racial quota, education etc. All of these help to prevent situations such as the few mentioned above from happening in Singapore.

Miscellaneous-Interview questions

Research Education 2011, Raffles Institution

Interview Questions



1. **What is the definition of racial harmony to you?**
2. **What do you think the government has done to facilitate racial harmony in Singapore?**
3. **Do you think the government has been successful in doing its part in promoting racial harmony?**
4. **Do you think racial harmony is important for Singapore’s success? Why?**
5. **How serious do you think the problem of racism is in Singapore?**
6. **What do you think we can do to maintain and improve racial harmony in Singapore?**
7. **Should we be doing more to promote racial harmony? Should we be using the hard method (HDB quota etc.) or the soft method (Organising events, educating the public using posters etc.)?**
8. **In an event (National Orange Ribbon Celebrations in Bishan), MM Lee said that Singapore was still**

*“A work in progress when it comes to nationhood”. “This (Multi-Racialism) is an ideal we may never completely reach.” “Will we always progress? We may easily regress.”* **Although we have come a long way since the racial riots of the 1960s; currently, how stable and strong do you think racial harmony and multi-culturalism is in Singapore?**

1. **Did the occurrence of globalisation and recent events both local (more moderate muslims, Christians prostlyzesing) and overseas (September 11, Mosque building near site of Ground Zero) affect racial harmony in Singapore?**
2. **Does OnePeople.sg encounter any difficulties when organising community events between different races?**
3. **Do you think Singaporean youths are too apathetic to the importance of racial harmony?**
4. **What are some of the challenges you have faced during the four years your company has been founded?**
5. **In his recent book, Hard Truths to Keep Singapore Going, MM Lee commented on how Muslims cannot readily integrate into the Singaporean society because of their religion. What is your opinion on that?**

Interview Transcript(Adapted)-Onepeople.sg

## Question 1:

Racial harmony is about understanding, respect, and appreciation of diversity. Racial harmony is a state where one has an identity, and that person also appreciates and agrees with others from different races. Racial harmony is also anchored on values. Examples of these values include understanding people from different races and having respect for them. Singaporeans uphold these values, which is why we can maintain racial harmony. We should learn how to live by these values, and also develop good relationships with people from different races.

## question 2:

The government has done a lot. The government started to intervene after the racial riots to ensure that Singapore was able to maintain racial harmony. The government has learnt many lessons after the riots. Singapore is a small country, we have a mix of different races, and thus it is important to develop integration in Singaporeans, as stability is important. There have been many government policies to help Singaporeans integrate, for example, the ethic integration policy, HDB housing quotes etc. Different racial groups are able to communicate with each other using English even though our national language is Malay, this allow racial groups to avoid conflict. It is necessary to create a common space for Singaporeans regardless of their race to allow them to interact with each other. Singapore is more like a salad bowl, instead of melting pot. As it is difficult to formulate the Singapore identity, the government decides to have individual identities, meaning that the racial groups can celebrate their own festivals and culture; however, they will be able to come together as Singaporeans when needed. This allows the racial groups to retain their cultural roots.

## QUestion 3:

Yes, the British Prime Minister said that the Multi-Culturism failed in Britain, as it led to enclaves, meaning that some parts of Britain were completely filled with people of the same race, this meant that people of different races did not interact with each other, all because there was no integration. This sort of “Hands Off” approach where different racial groups are allowed to do whatever they want, which affected the racial harmony in Britain. This is because the British were thinking of developing a British identity for each of their citizens. This leads to instability as they have different mindsets and attitude towards each other, which causes instability. Singapore has a unique approach where we allow expressions of different cultures and languages. Common space in Singapore is important as it allows Singaporean citizens to mix and interact with people of different races; this allows Singaporeans to understand each other which will lead to a certain level of tolerance between different races. Singaporeans have learned when they have to come together under a Singaporean identity, this model makes us unique, and is crucial for maintaining racial harmony; there is also a need to widen the common space between the different racial groups, which will lead to higher levels of tolerance.

## question 4:

During a pledge drive, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew said that, “Harmony is the base for prosperity in Singapore.” Without racial harmony, conflict and tension would ensue. With racial problems, Singapore would be unable to produce bright people to support the nation’s growth. The biggest asset of Singapore is our manpower, our people. Singapore needs people to live together harmoniously, because racial harmony is the base for all prosperity in Singapore. People are attracted to Singapore because Singapore is industrialised, Singapore is safe. All these attract people from all walks of life, from all over the world. Thus people in Singapore have to learn how to live together. Thus it is important for people living in Singapore to live with each other without conflict. Without conflict, the people will able to focus on economy building, this allows people to get jobs. Jobs for people lead to money, money leads to less personal angst, without personal angst, we are able to grow and develop.

## question 5:

Singapore has no serious issues compared to other places outside. Singaporeans do not have much sense of racism. Racism is not a large problem in Singapore as it is sporadic. Singaporean citizens have more stereotypes rather than racism.

## question 6:

In order to promote racial harmony, it should be ground up. Singaporeans should not take our current situation for granted. People relations will change over time, there will also be demographic change, and there will be new immigrants, foreigners. Racial harmony is a work in progress, if Singaporeans become complacent, problems will occur. The ideal racial harmony situation is where it becomes a way of life for Singaporeans. To improve racial harmony, citizens need to initiate racial harmony by themselves, it needs to be citizen-felt, racial harmony needs to be pragmatic. Citizens should attempt to widen the common space by themselves; they can do this by making friendships, simple gestures, which will improve racial harmony. We will have reached the ideal racial harmony status when racial harmony becomes a way a life for Singaporeans. Singapore has too much to lose if racial harmony doesn’t continue, as we will lose our biggest asset, our manpower.

## question 7

A bit of both, it has worked for Singapore so far, government policies have also helped. Getting large throngs of people of different races to come together and mix together and interact is not easy. Other advanced countries such as Britain have openly admitted of failing in racial harmony. Singapore has advantages; we are stable, our leaders are forward thinking. We should implement some of the softer approach.

## question 8:

We have come a long way since the 1960s. We were faced with many challenges. We should try to go from inter-racial harmony to intra-racial harmony. Racial harmony is still a work in progress in Singapore. Racial harmony however, is not as fragile as in the 1960s. Singaporeans have a high level of tolerance, but tolerance has a limit. To achieve real racial harmony, we should try to reach understanding between different races because tolerance is the lowest denominator. Understanding allows people of different races to connect with each other, this will lead to respect between racial groups. Singapore still has a long way to go in the pursuit of the ideal of perfect racial harmony.

## question 9:

Overseas events such as ground zero. We are not be shaken up by events around the world because of high levels of tolerance among Singaporeans. If dissatisfaction is felt among Singaporeans, it goes through a channel which helps to better manage the dissatisfaction. Good sense in Singaporeans who understand the values of racial harmony and thus are not affected by events of the outside world. We have a certain level of understanding which allows us to not be impacted heavily by other events.

## question 10:

Getting them (the youths) to come together is not an issue, how much they come together is an issue. Singapore has enough community events to bring them together, it all depends on how much of the youth’s mindset and attitude has shifted. Organising certain projects with community leaders that are of depth will allow the youths to change their mind-set. There is however, difficulty in measuring the outcome of the events.

## question 11:

Sometimes youths do not know how to appreciate. The older generations that have been through the riots, understand how Singapore would be without it. As we cannot show new generations the past, however, youths will be able to get a sense as schools want students to know about racial harmony. Surveys show that youths have a strong sense of racial harmony. Youths however, do not see avenues to do things about racial harmony. Thus racial harmony needs to be from the ground, meaning that the youths could initiate community involvement projects to promote racial harmony. More could be done by the youths to give them a heightened sense of racial harmony

## question 12:

The problem is how to engage youths, and how to better engage them. The vision is to be a ground up movement. Citizens need to have the initiative to promote racial harmony. Youths are the generation of the future, need to feel racial harmony from the heart to uphold what our forefathers wanted. The youths should take on opportunities. We should also give room for youths to talk and express their views. Onepeople allows youths to take part in discussion of the racial harmony.

## question 13:

People are getting more religious. Religion should not affect day to day life interactions. Things have moved on. Muslims do not mind eating with other people of halal food. People are more educated. Muslims do not want to constrain the other people’s space. There is a certain level of flexibility. Personal experience shows that religion does not hold back other people’s space.

interview analysis:onepeople.sg

About us

We are a group of four Year 2 students aged 13 to 14 years old from Raffles Institution, Singapore. We are made up of four members, our names are as follows: Joshua Tee (Group Leader), Ryan Yap, Rishi Varman, and Abdul Musawwir. Our teacher mentor is Mrs Cheryl Yap

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